

# “Put passengers first to lure them back to heritage railways” say industry analysts

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New research by the Rail And Station Innovation Company (RASIC) for railway product suppliers Shed Number 2 shows the heritage rail industry needs to further embrace technology for revenue and recovery after the COVID lockdowns.

The research also reveals gaps in telling customers how seriously COVID safety measures are being taken, with no heritage railway scoring either of RASIC's top ratings.

The COVID pandemic has brought significant challenges for the rail industry as a whole. But heritage railways have suffered more significantly because journeys on their services are recreational, rather than out of necessity.

So how do these lines lure passengers back to these charming time capsules in these uncertain times? To aid the industry, this report investigates heritage railways in the United Kingdom and Ireland, specifically their online presence, website user-interface, booking system, COVID-19 management and the overall seamlessness of the customer experience.

Customers seek to enjoy the heritage feel of the railway services with the benefits of modern technology and the web for booking and communication.

A total of 135 Heritage Railways were examined and categorised using the following criteria: online presence, booking system, customer experience and COVID-19 control management.

The online publication of COVID control measures was also investigated in this report. This was a crucial part of our study and the results should hopefully act as a call to action to maximise chances of recovery post-COVID for the heritage railways we surveyed. Prospective passengers will only book services they feel are likely to be safe for their family.

35 out of the 135 railways surveyed (26%) had no COVID detail on their websites. And of those which did, none scored the top rating for published measures and reassurance to the public. 80 lines (59%) scored a rating of 3, showing they had applied for the 'Good to Go' approval from the tourist body Visit England. Communication of how hard these railways have worked to satisfy guidelines shows room for improvement.

Marcus Mayers, Director of RASIC, said: "RASIC is all about placing the customer at the heart of the passenger experience and this is crucial on heritage railways. COVID has deterred people from train travel across the board and tourist attractions like heritage railways took a bashing.

"We need to persuade the public back to these delicious time capsules, which capture the joy of railway travel from yesteryear. Our report seeks to help the industry find a successful way forward in both the short and longer term. Concentrating on getting the online offering right means people can buy tickets AND feel COVID-safe from one visit to a line's webpage.

"This report, created for our sister company Shed Number 2, is an offering of knowledge and insight from our own place of passion – heritage rail – to the lines around the UK and Ireland. And we stand beside and support you in any way we can as you look to the future."

The full report offers suggestions on how heritage railways can begin bridging this gap between the antiquity of their product with the huge boons of online – and gain maximum value through overall service improvement and customer satisfaction; maximising the joy of heritage with the benefits technology can bring. Ultimately, passengers expect it now.

The full report and data sheet is available on request. For more details email Marcus Mayers at [marcus.mayers@rasic.co.uk](mailto:marcus.mayers@rasic.co.uk)

*Photo credit: Shed Number 2. 2019*